

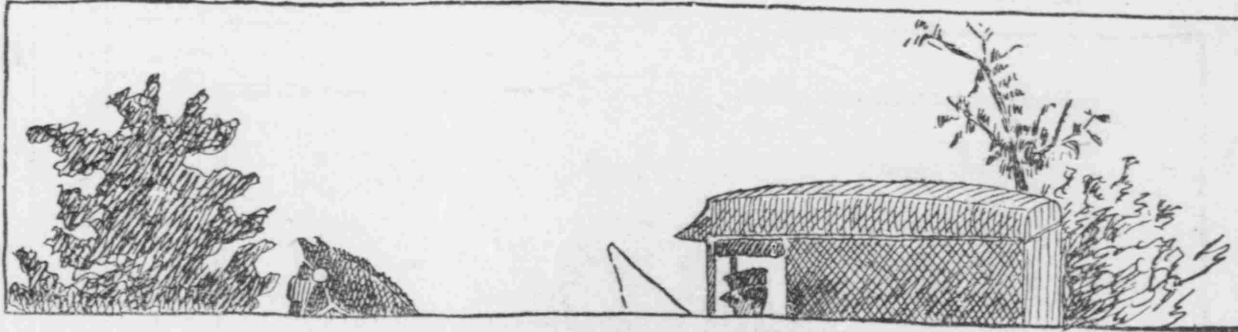
WASHINGTON'S POTTER'S FIELD AND ITS STORIES OF PATHOS



The Oldest Died First.



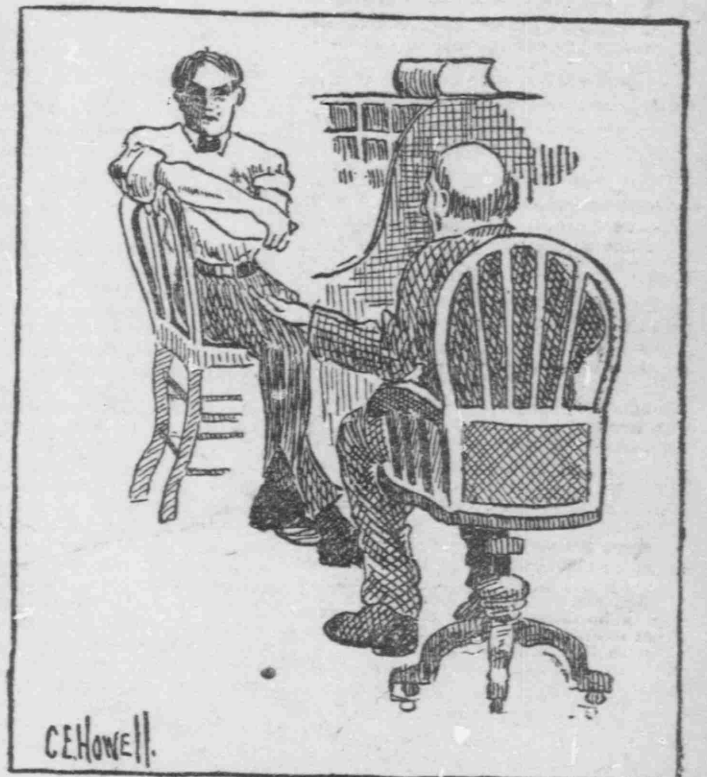
A Scene of Bygone Days.



Lowering a Pauper Into His Final Resting Place in Washington's Potter's Field With Aid of Convict Laborers.



"But What Does It Matter?"



C.E. Howell.

Trip in Black Wagon and Talk With Its Driver—Schooled to Forget Details of Life Crowded With Stories of Sorrow.

HAVE you ever thought of what becomes of the unfortunates who die without relatives or friends who are disposed or able to give them a decent Christian interment; of the miserable outcasts about you, who pass away with the depressing thought that, besides the question of what is to become of that which is immortal in them, they are creating a problem for those they leave behind how to hide away from the sight of men the wretched bodies that have been battered and trampled upon by the ruthless "god in the car"—of the disposition of the pauper dead?

It is not a pleasant subject for meditation, but, possibly, if more attention were paid to it, there would be less contributions each year to missions working thousands of miles away from home and some money diverted to this crying need in the heart of the most beautiful and best governed city in the country.

Is there no way by which the losers in the battle of life can secure at the end a simple burial, with some clergyman to read over their remains a short prayer before committing them to the dust of which they were created? Are there none to lay even one flower on the naked earth flung upon the coffin? Of the millions given each year to charity, could not a part be set aside to rear a simple headstone to the memory of those who had no taste of the pleasures of living?

Government Provides for It.

"But," some will say, "the District government, with the money which we contribute through taxes, does provide for a burial of the dead. They have a coffin and are interred in a cemetery set apart for the purpose. And there is a record kept of the names and dates of death and burial. Is that not all that is necessary?"

Would that be all you wish for a member of your own family? Enough to have the body taken up and borne away by men who, having a disagreeable duty to perform, wish to hurry through it. To be rattled across the city in the "dead wagon" and at the end hurriedly lowered into a nameless grave which has been dug and is filled by convict labor. And beside this fresh grave there yawns from three to six more waiting for the next to die.

In the list of the unknown dead who know how many may have families somewhere waiting for their return? Who, ignorant of their fate, would have given them a resting-place in some cemetery where there are trees and flowers and grass. Which sizes up to an intelligent conception of the meaning of "God's acre." And not left them to sleep their long sleep in the bare stretch of ground without adornment or softening association that comprises the potter's field.

Burial of Indigent Dead.

The burial of the pauper dead of the District is under the management of the Washington Asylum. There are two general courses of procedure by which the assistance of the city authorities is secured. The city provides doctors for the poor. When a death occurs where such a doctor has been in attendance, he issues a certificate of death and indorses it: "Famously unable to bury." If there has been no physician the coroner issues the certificate. In either case,

the Health Office notifies the asylum to remove the body and give it burial.

Under the new laws the unknown dead are given burial without exception. But those who are known are held at the morgue and their relatives notified. If the body is not claimed within a certain time the Morgue-master, who is the agent of the Anatomical Society, has the right to turn it over to the medical colleges as a subject for the dissecting table or have it buried at his discretion. Anyone who can establish relationship may require that burial be given. More than that, the dying person may request that his body be buried and not delivered to the colleges. Such a request is held sacred.

End of Grave Robbing.

Since these laws have come into operation there has been an end to grave robbing. The colleges are no longer obliged to employ ghoul to furnish a necessary adjunct to the instruction of anatomical science. At the same time the restrictions and limitations have been so carefully drawn that the horrible necessity is satisfied without unduly outraging the average conception of humanity.

The life of the man who drives the dead wagon is about as unpleasant as any in the District service. In his daily work he sees only the sad side of life and much that is revolting. It is not for him to think of the pathos, and he must steel his heart against the suffering and misery constantly before his eyes. There is frequently unfolded to him the worst traits of human nature, with but an occasional redeeming incident of a better side. There is much that under different circumstances would be most amusing.

Trip in Black Wagon.

A Times reporter recently made a trip in the black wagon and conversed with the driver on the subject of his experiences. Some of the facts brought out are, of course, too gruesome to bear repetition. There are many things in life that are better left undiscussed and the driver of the dead wagon sees most of them.

When asked what was the saddest sight he had seen during his experience, the man hesitated some time. He finally replied that though he had seen much that was sad, he had schooled himself to forget as soon as possible the details of his daily life. He had become so far successful in this that frequently he would go through with a "case" and on to the next without remembering any of the details. There was one incident, however, that had impressed him deeply.

English Family's Dead.

An English family moved into Washington last winter and found themselves in a strange country without money or friends. The home they secured was the basement of a house, which was in bad repair. The rooms they lived and slept in were not heated, and parts of the floor were covered with water that had backed in from the sewer. As was to be expected, the children, three in all, soon became ill. The oldest, a boy of seven years, died first. There was no money to bury him, so the doctor notified the Health Office and the wagon was called. The grief of the parents impressed the driver, hardened as he had become. Their greatest sorrow seemed to be that their first born was going to a grave in a foreign country, where they

would lose him forever and never be able to see his body to the old home in England should they achieve the fortune they had come to America to seek. The driver explained to them that a complete record of the grave was kept, and that at any time they could secure a permit to have the body exhumed. He then told them that they might be present at the interment, and arranged an hour for them to come to the cemetery.

Buried at Sunset.

The boy was laid to rest just at sunset, and the father, with bare head, stood at the foot of the grave, while the afflicted mother, with an infant in her arms, wept at the head. For the first time in years the convicts paused when the coffin was lowered into the grave, and removed their hats in respectful silence while a few heartfelt prayers were uttered over the dead. The dirt was flung upon the coffin without coarse or brutal comment, and for once the prisoners lost sight of their relief at the completion of the task in a rough sympathy for the delicate woman who flung herself upon the cold earth in an agony of grief.

Man of Some Wealth. It was learned that he had been a man of considerable wealth and social standing in his own city, and was traveling for pleasure at the time he was taken ill and removed to the Washington hospital from the train. It was never understood how it happened that no money or means of identification were found about his clothing, and but for an unforeseen delay at the asylum he would have been placed in a pauper's grave.

Another incident of potter's field was less fortunate. A body of a drowned man was recovered in the Eastern Branch. Every effort to identify it was made. Several days after a white-haired man of distinguished appearance came to the asylum, and made inquiries regarding recent burials. He was shown articles of clothing kept to identify the unknown buried dead, and quickly recognized a shoe of the drowned man, who was missing. The body was exhumed, and proved to be the missing son.

The young man had been a graduate of one of the leading colleges of the country and had traveled extensively in foreign countries. He spoke Chinese and other languages with the greatest fluency, and had been at the commencement of what promised to prove a most brilliant career.

His father was a clergyman, pastor of one of the largest churches in a Northern city, and the family was very prominent. It was never learned whether the young man committed suicide, was accidentally drowned, or met with foul play. When they raised the body to the level of the grave, the white-haired old man wrung his hands in agony, exclaiming with streaming eyes: "Merciful God, can that be my son?"

Buries Two a Day.

The District buries, on an average, two paupers a day. The number last year was 719. The latest addition to potter's field, next to the female workhouse, was opened in April. There are nearly 50 graves there at the present writing. The greatest number of burials during a single month was during the blizzard in Washington, when eighty-five interments were made through the asylum. The greatest number of funerals from any one undertaking establishment for the same time was eighty-two.

The office of the permit clerk of the Health Department, where the permits for burials are issued, share in the experiences of the driver of the dead wagon. Fortunately for them, there are many amusing incidents to break the routine.

Some Peculiar Requests.

Among the peculiar requests they have had was one from a negro woman who came to complain that a certain saloonkeeper would not sell her a drink, and she wished the permit clerk to take up the matter and investigate it, inasmuch that she was being discriminated against. On another occasion an old soldier

dropped in to make a swift touch. He had his pension papers along to prove his identity, and being very thirsty he explained that he really needed the money. The man in charge happened to have only a quarter of a dollar about him and needed that to ride home. He therefore explained that he was likewise temporarily embarrassed and could not finance the liquor expedition.

Thereupon the old soldier decided that if he could not visit the saloon, he would make the permit clerk a visit. He selected a comfortable chair and proceeded to fight over some of his old battles for the information of his host. There was plenty of work piled up, and the office man twisted about uneasily in his chair as he endeavored to keep his mind on what he was doing and disregard the old warrior's reminiscences. By the time the battle of Gettysburg was reached he could stand no more, and producing the quarter entrusted his guest to take it and go out and get drunker if possible.

Friends Invoke Aid.

Many of the relatives of the dead come to the office and state their inability to bury them, and request the assistance of the District. The wagon is sent to the address given only to be met with a statement that the bodies will not be given up as the family has decided to hire an undertaker. Sometimes a refusal is made for an adequate reason, in which case, the driver has to accomplish his work by force.

This happened in a negro family. When the wagon arrived at the house the mother of the dead child made no objection. There were, however, eight other negro women living at the same place and the entire household was exceedingly drunk, including the mother. Two of the women, in no way related to the dead child, opposed the driver when he started out with the coffin. This was the signal for a general attack upon him, and he found it necessary to call in police assistance to accomplish his duty.

Negroes Are Superstitious.

Among the negroes there is a great deal of superstition connected with death. They never allow the driver of the dead wagon to enter the front door. Moreover, if he comes in one door he must depart the same way. Not to do so, they believe, would bring a hoodoo upon the household. Sometimes their superstitious fears are so great that when a death occurs they lock the dead in the house and depart until after the body has been removed.

One old woman has a novel way of exercising charms and spells incidental to death. The driver noticed her peculiar behavior on several occasions when he was called to the house. She invariably caused him to delay until she could mix a basin full of soapuds. With this in her hand, she would follow him out of the door and to the wagon, sprinkling the soapuds along the way. He had traversed, much as flowers are strewn before the path of some one that is to be highly honored. Her queer actions were accompanied by constant mumblings, but she never explained what it all meant.

Contagious Disease Deaths.

There is a separate burying ground for those who have died of contagious diseases. It is down along the river bank where the ground is low and swampy. There is no record kept of these lonely graves and there is no way of securing the privilege of exhuming the bodies. The very spot where they are buried is being slowly filled in by the dirt and trash that accumulates there, and the principal object desired is that the place become covered up and lost to sight.

Sent in Complaint.

One or two of them had actually written to the board of health complaining of his half washed or unwashed crockery and cutlery. Didn't you know that complaints of that sort are constantly received by the board of health against restaurants? Well, they are. I run across them in my business. As a result I say to hotel men who employ me: "It is the particular customers who make or mar the reputation of your restaurant. Please the particular customers, and you will have no trouble with the others." "It did not take me long to find out

are sunk lower in caste than their fellow-paupers. The potter's field presents a striking contrast to the old Congressional cemetery that borders it. In the latter there are many handsome tombstones and monuments. Numbers of stately old trees fling their shadow over the resting-place of an honored dead. The graves are carefully tended; the grass grows above them, and flowers and shrubs border the pathways between. In the cemetery there is a suggestion of peace and restfulness.

But the pauper cemetery is far different from this. It lies amid scenes of suffering and sickness, and the punishment of crime. At the foot of the hill are the sluggish waters of the Eastern Branch, and still nearer are the tracks of the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Day and night the fast passenger trains for the North dash past with whistling and ringing of bells. But what does it matter? The noise from the railroad will not disturb the dead in that bare field. As Hood sang: "Rattle his bones over the stones; he's only an old pauper whom nobody owns."

Often a Promising Career May Be Terminated With Burial by Convict Laborers in Unmarked Grave, Where Paupers Sleep.

Webby, formerly only cook, is now kitchen organizer.

ALMOST any evening, when he isn't working as a reformer in one of the swell kitchens of New York, one may meet among the sporting fraternity in the highly decorated barrooms of Longacre a plump, prosperous little man who is known to the groups around the ticker and on the race tracks as "Webby."

Nobody Wanted Webby.

Nobody wanted a cook who had no experience in an American hotel and who understood English imperfectly. French cooking was not so much in vogue then in New York hotels as it is today. But one day "Webby" answered an advertisement calling for a German cook.

"Ever work in New York?" asked the manager of the hotel. "No," answered "Webby," pocketing his credentials and expecting the usual rebuff.

To his astonishment the manager replied: "Good. I guess you're just the man I want."

"It appeared," said "Webby" in relating his experience, "that everything was going to the bad in his kitchen. Like most hotel managers of the old school, he saw to it personally that things were kept at concert pitch in his bar, cafe, and restaurant, but he seldom went below stairs. As a result several of his best customers had left him."

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Demolished the Sinks.

"I tore down the wooden sinks and substituted slate or porcelain-lined metal. I threw away iron and agate kettles and substituted copper utensils lined with enamel. I told the boss that in the best kitchens of Europe the copper kettles were lined with silver, but he wouldn't stand for it. I made my assistants stir the food with wooden spoons instead of metal ones. I taught them how to cook soups in earthen pots instead of in metal. I put in a charcoal range for broiling steaks and fish. It retains the true flavor better than a gas or a coal fire. The reforms I have mentioned are essential in every up-to-date kitchen."

"In less than a year we had all our old customers back, and so many new ones that the boss enlarged the dining-room. That was the beginning of my career as a kitchen organizer. I have done, and am still doing, the same work for a score or more of hotels and apartment houses that where a large number of persons are to be provided for, kitchens should not be poked in any old corner, they should be given as much consideration as the sleeping rooms, and far more than the billiard room or smoking room."

In Private Houses.

"I have done the same thing in private houses, whose owners entertain on a lavish scale. There are many fine private kitchens in New York, but not so fine as the stately homes of the landed aristocrats of Europe. Still, one could not wish a better kitchen than can be found in the homes of Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, of Elbridge T. Gerry, or in the house of the late William C. Whitney, now owned by 'Silent' Smith. I think these are the best private kitchens in New York."

"There are splendid kitchens in the first class clubs of New York, particularly the Metropolitan, the Union, and the University. Whenever I am consulted on new work, my fight is for a room, more room, and still more room. Architects are beginning to understand that where a large number of persons are to be provided for, kitchens should not be poked in any old corner, they should be given as much consideration as the sleeping rooms, and far more than the billiard room or smoking room."

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